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ABSTRACT

Within recent educational history, the needs of academic students have been attended to before the needs of vocational and technical students. Academic teachers must undergo a change in attitude toward the vocational-technical (votech) students and the careers they pursue. It is suggested in this paper that information concerning vocational education should be incorporated into the preservice teacher education courses in foundations of education. Preservice exposure to votech education would encompass three parts: (1) an orientation, including specific reference to the application of each of the educational foundation areas to a votech education; (2) a tour of a votech school; and (3) a wrap-up debriefing following the votech school visit. In addition to educating preservice teachers about votech education, there is a need to educate inservice teachers. Most important would be the education of secondary teachers who are called upon to teach English to votech students. A description is given to a 3-week period inservice program that has been successful in enlightening teachers on the career choices open to votech students. Three brief attachments relate oral communication skills to vocational education. (JD)

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Vocational-Technical Education: An Overlooked Component in Teacher Training?

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Vocational-Technical Education: An Overlooked Component in Teacher Training?

INTRODUCTION

Today's elementary- and secondary-level academic teachers are often unfamiliar with the vocational-technical world of work and/or training. Their traditional middle-class upbringing and academically oriented college education make it difficult for many of them to identify with votech careers or with those pursuing such careers.

Although a general state of ignorance regarding vocational-technical education exists across all grade levels, outright hostility surfaces in secondary schools where some teachers (and fellow academic students) refer to votech students as "tech rats," "vo-tards," "speds," and "losers." These same teachers are heard to say, "I taught them this year, let someone else teach them next year." Like the current television program, they feel they have done their "tour of duty." Such negative expectations can, and do, serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby many votech students live up to, or perhaps better said, down to, the academic teachers' expectations of them.

Elementary- and secondary-level academic teachers simply must undergo a change in attitude toward votech students and the careers they pursue. It is not only an "equity issue," meaning that votech students, like all other students, are entitled to the best education the state can offer devoid of teacher ignorance and/or prejudice, it is a "numbers issue." According to Secondary Vocational Education Statistics 1986-87 (Pennsylvania Department of Education, March, 1988), there were 167,000 students enrolled in secondary-level vocational education programs in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania during 1986-87. Of these, 106,000 attended a vocational education program operated by a high school, while another 61,000 attended a vocational education program operated by an area vocational-technical school (AVTS). There are 85 AVTS's in Pennsylvania. Fifty-six percent of the secondary-level vocational students were female; 44% were male.

Votech students choose a votech education as an addition to, not as a substitute for, the state's mandated academic curricula in English, mathematics, science, and social studies. Selecting a votech education relieves neither the votech students nor their teachers from learning or teaching, respectively, the prescribed academic portion of the school's curriculum. In order for teachers to meet their responsibility, they must learn much more about votech education than they currently know.

At this point, it may be tempting for some readers to view this as only a problem for high school teachers--the academic teachers who actually teach 10th, 11th, and 12th grade votech students. The fact is, although high school teachers play the major role in providing career training, elementary and junior-high teachers, too, have a responsibility for enthusiastically and fairly promoting career awareness and career exploration. All teachers have a need to know more about vocational-technical education than they currently know.

POSSIBLE REMEDIES

Pre-service Education

One place to start is with those college students who currently are training to be teachers. Informal surveys conducted by the author of pre-service teachers reveal that 67% have never visited a votech school and 17% attended high schools where no fellow students took part in a votech program. One survey respondent boldly stated, "I was never informed of one (votech school/program), and I would not have been interested in one even if I had been informed." Clearly, many soon-to-be teachers have little information regarding votech programs and careers.

Information concerning vocational education should be incorporated into the college students' required foundations of education course. This course, stressing sociological, philosophical, historical, political, and economic foundations, is a natural arena for presenting and discussing vocational-technical education.

Votech education can be introduced during sociological foundations, the study of how people (e.g., blacks, women, votech students) as a group act and react. I start this section off by entering my foundations' classroom and screaming, "What do you mean I am prejudiced, some of my best friends are Jews." This statement has an immediate impact. Overwhelmingly my students feel that by my making the statement that I am not prejudiced that actually I am prejudiced. When I go on to make a similar statement, "What do you mean I am prejudiced, some of my best students have been votech students," the message is clear.

When I point out that votech students who attend an AVTS may, as a group, respond with "tech rat" behaviors because they are expected to respond that way while at the home academic high school, the sociological pressures are evident. When it is noted that some votech schools refuse to take students with less than average intelligence, it becomes clear that, as a group, these votech schools want to raise the perception of their station in life--they want to put to an end society's image that, "If he can't work with his head, he can always work with his hands." Once again, sociological pressure is evident.

Discussions of the generally accepted need for vocational education, but for someone else's child, highlight the current second-class status that awaits those choosing a vocational education. In spite of making significant progress, the recognition that votech career areas are often still segregated along gender lines reflects society's views that certain jobs are acceptable for males and females.

When it is pointed out that, at least within recent educational history, the needs of academic students have been attended to before the needs of vocational students, both historical and sociological foundations are noted. For example, the National Defense Education Act in 1958 preceded the National Vocational Education Act of 1961; and guidance counselors were not made available to votech schools until the mid-60's, while academic high schools had had guidance counselors for decades. Is it the case that only academic students require guidance?

Philosophical foundations are seen in many ways in the study of votech schools and in their instructional procedures. Many educational philosophies give lip service to treating students as individuals, respecting them, trusting them, etc. Nowhere in American education is such individualization, mutual respect, and trust better seen than at a votech school. In a single shop one is likely to find 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students--often with more experienced students being trusted to teach less experienced students. The range of abilities within a votech school and, for that matter, often within a given shop, is staggering. Yet, these individualities are accommodated.

Describing how a votech lunch room is unsupervised, yet self-disciplined, is received by foundations of education students as something quite unbelievable. Relating stories of stopping at a votech lab to drop off work, only to be greeted by a student foreman (not the instructor) who writes up the job, assigns the work, and is responsible for its timely completion is also viewed, at first, as amazing. Telling how it is commonplace to walk into a shop and see students busy at their individual tasks, even when the instructor temporarily may be elsewhere, brings forth confessions that that would have rarely been the case in an academic classroom. Describing what is standard operating procedure for most votech schools begins to translate the philosophical goals of "individuality," "mutual respect," and "trust" into concrete terms.

As a follow-up experience to discussing how vocational education fits into the various educational foundations areas (e.g., sociological, philosophical), teacher trainers should consider taking students on at least a half-day field trip to a nearby votech school. Much of what might be discussed about a votech school, its students, its teachers, and its instructional procedures, really ought to be experienced firsthand. Most votech schools are used to having visitors and thus are usually quite accommodating to requests for such a tour.

A tour through a votech school, especially an Area Vocational Technical School, is a real eye-opener. The tour lets one see the pride students have in their work, the emphasis upon theory in every shop, and the chalkboard after chalkboard filled with mathematics. One sees work at different stages of completion, sees blueprints and theory-based instruction everywhere, sees the VICA (Vocational Industrial Clubs of America) banners and trophies, and sees males and females in nontraditional areas. At our AVTS, visitors see the masonry teacher (who happens to have a Master's degree in English), the petite female who is the building principal, and all the computers in labs from tool and die to electronics, to metal fabrication and auto mechanics.

Visiting votech labs, especially a tool and die shop or an electronics lab, is an enlightening experience when it comes to economics. One quickly realizes that votech education offers students education and training with state-of-the-art equipment, recommended by local craft committees, that would cost a small fortune to experience elsewhere. Excluding selected lab-oriented science courses, the cost of an additional enrolled academic student in an academic program may consist of just adding another desk and providing another book. It is not so economically simple in vocational-technical education. On a reimbursement basis, votech students are "worth more" to school districts.

A wrap-up discussion of a votech tour usually has at least one foundations student commenting that vocational-technical schools are one of the best kept secrets in American education today. Nowhere is this more evident than among foundations students who attended private rather than public high schools.

The point is, students who are in teacher training today, will be tomorrow's teachers. Shouldn't they know the various educational and training alternatives that are available to their students? Attending a college is one alternative. Attending a votech school is another alternative--no better or worse. Further, whether a school district participates in an AVTS or supports its own votech school, vocational-technical offerings are simply an extension of each school's curriculum. Votech teachers, 41% of whom hold Masters degrees in Pennsylvania, will be one's fellow teachers--one's colleagues. Whether the votech offerings are available "down the hall" in the same building, or "down the road" in another building, they are still part of a total school district's program--no more and no less than other subjects that are offered. Students in teacher training programs need to <u>know</u> this is true--they need to <u>feel</u> this is true.

In effect, a good pre-service exposure to votech education would encompass three parts: 1) an orientation, including specific reference to the application of each of the educational foundation areas to a votech education, 2) a tour of a votech school, and 3) a wrap-up debriefing following the votech school visit. Foundations students should be asked to share both the information they have gained with regards to, and attitudes they have developed towards, votech education. They should be asked to suggest just how their new-found knowledge and attitudes might be translated into concrete actions as a future teacher.

The result of this three-pronged foundations of education program will be teachers who are better equipped to serve the needs of all students, including those considering, as well as those choosing, a votech program.

Inservice Education

In addition to educating pre-service teachers about votech education, we need to educate inservice teachers. Most urgent would be the education of secondary teachers who are called upon, sometimes under coercion, to teach votech students the English, mathematics, science, and social studies that make up a typical votech student's academic schedule.

Teaching votech students (especially those who attend an area vocational-technical schools) the academics they require is made more difficult by scheduling necessities that have students spending half of their time at the AVTS and half of their time at the academic home school. Scheduling patterns such as week-about, two-weeks about, and half-day about regularly exist for 10th, 11th and 12th grade votech students. While at their home academic school, some votech students may be mixed with regular academic students and told to catch up as best they can for the time they have been away. In other home schools, votech students are kept together, having little or no contact with high school peers. Teachers find themselves either trying to deal with votech students who are in regular classes "only half the time," or trying to deal with solely votech classes where students feel segregated and apart from other high school students.

In Pennsylvania, the scheduling problem is exacerbated by the Commonwealth's requirement that votech students have the same minimum amount of academic subjects as other students. The result is that votech students must schedule two periods of English a day and two periods of social studies a day. When we add to these circumstances the fact that most high school teachers have never visited their local votech school, have never met with votech teacher colleagues, have never taken coursework on how to effectively deal with votech students, and have rarely (if ever) explored the application of their subject matter (e.g., English) to the votech world, we have the makings of a real disaster.

One way to help remedy this situation is to offer to inservice teachers a more intense version of the three-pronged program earlier described for pre-service foundations of education students. The program for inservice teachers should include: 1) an orientation stressing the application of the educational foundation areas to votech education, 2) a day-long, hands-on experience working in one or more votech shops, and 3) a debriefing following the hands-on experience. Note, it is the second part of the program that is more intense--a hand-on experience versus just a tour.

Comments on the Three-Pronged Inservice Program

The following three-pronged, over a three-week period, inservice program is one that I have personally been involved in on a repeated basis and have found to be effective. The key points of the program are highlighted below.

Week One: Orientation (1-hour)

For the orientation meeting, I met with the academic teacher participants (volunteers) on their home turf--at their high school. At this meeting I introduced some of the points I have made earlier in this paper regarding the historical, sociological, philosophical, economic, and political foundational forces of education as they might apply to vocational education.

Great pains were taken to avoid assigning any sort of blame. Instead, I simply pointed out the need for votech students to be as well equipped with appropriate academic (e.g., mathematics, English) skills as possible. Local as well as national surveys of employers citing the need for votech employees to possess appropriate academic skills and knowledge were cited. (See the attached local survey results.) Every effort was made to point out that vocational students, programs, and educators desperately need the help of home school academic teachers. In turn, I attempted to sell the following week's hands-on votech experience as one way to help academic teachers learn more about votech students and votech education.

At the end of the orientation, participants were informed what shops that they would attend, were assigned in pairs (like the buddy system in swimming) to specific shops, were told what to wear for their designated shop, and were told where and when to meet for the day-long, hands-on experience at our local AVTS.

Week Two: Hands-On Experience (7-hours)

Academic teachers were greeted at the AVTS, taken to their assigned shop, introduced to the shop instructor and to their student tutor, and were ready to begin. Using student tutors not only permitted the participants to develop a rapport with at least one votech student, but this arrangement also freed the instructor to conduct the shop in a normal fashion. One shop instructor was so confident of his students that he lined them up, sophomores through seniors, and invited the participants to take their choice of tutors.

Shop instructors and student tutors had been asked beforehand to design a hands-on project for the academic teachers that could be completed in one day. In machine shop, for instance, the participants used a Bridgeport milling machine, engine lathe, and drill press to make an aluminum meat tenderizer. Starting with rough stock, the teachers did each step of the project themselves after first watching their tutors. The academic teachers' determination to finish their projects and take home tangible evidence of their experience told them something about the determination and motivation regularly felt by votech students.

Except for a brief tour of the school's facilities, especially the well-stocked technical library, participants stayed in their assigned shops working on their projects. Their only breaks were two ten-minute coffee breaks and a half-hour lunch. Participants ate lunch with their student tutors, either in the cafeteria or in the Erie Room, a restaurant-style arrangement run by the Commercial Foods shop.

In every shop Polaroid pictures were taken at intervals during the day to provide participants with a record of their efforts. These photos, which served to emphasize processes as well as products in the votech world, were not made available to the participants until the debriefing session during week three.

At the end of the day, the very exhausted academic teachers were taken to a room and asked to record their feelings and observations. Among the typical comments were, "I had not realized how seriously the students take their program, nor to what degree they and their instructors demand excellence"; and, "Before the program I was very much aware that academic knowledge was applied to votech, but was not aware <u>how</u> it was applied."

Participants were also asked to suggest specific ways to incorporate the hands-on experience into their future teaching. Among the plans offered were, "I have underestimated the tech student and will expect more of them in the home school"; "I plan to rework my present course of study to include written and oral reports that center on vocational-technical education"; and, "I plan to work with votech teachers and come up with an English program to help interest votech students."

Week Three: Debriefing (1-hour)

The debriefing meeting once again took place on the academic participants' home turf--their academic high school. At this time the Polaroid pictures were distributed and used as discussion starters to assess each participant's shop experience in terms of knowledge gained and degree of positive attitude developed toward votech education and students. The pictures, which in most cases ended up on display on each teacher's bulletin board, helped the teachers to relive the past week's day-long AVTS experience.

Summaries of the participants' impressions <u>and</u> their specific plans (over 300) for change as a result of taking part in the hands-on AVTS experience were also distributed. An opportunity was made available to generate still more concrete ideas for incorporating the hands-on experience into their teaching. Without exception, each participant felt the three-pronged inservice program was valuable and filled a void in their professional training. All participants felt that their fellow teachers should take part in a similar inservice program.

High School English Teachers: A Special Case

Although all secondary academic teachers, as well as elementary teachers, could profit from this three-pronged inservice program, I will make a special case for high school English teachers. As a fundamental skill, English, and all that it involves in the way of communication (e.g., writing, speaking, listening,) rivals mathematics as a needed skill for votech students. But, unlike English, mathematics is specifically taught in votech schools by competent and confident shop instructors and often by mathematics teachers hired by these votech schools. Algebra, trigonometry, geometry, and even calculus are recognized as being crucial to many votech programs and, thus, are made available.

When it comes to teaching English, the story is quite different. Although English, as a communication skill, is thought by everyone to be important, no one appears to be taking specific responsibility for its effective instruction. Home school English teachers too often teach their subject as they would teach it to any high school student. Little, if any, attempt is made by English teachers to stress their subject's specific application to the votech world. How could they given their general lack of information regarding the votech world?

Votech shop instructors typically have little specific training, and even less confidence, when it comes to specific instruction in the area of communication--writing, speaking, listening. It is not that they do not, themselves, do a lot of each, it is just that they feel ill prepared to formally teach English skills as they might teach machine manipulative skills and associated trade-specific mathematics. Votech teachers mistakenly assume home school English teachers are doing the job. Finally, it is the rare votech school that hires separate English teachers, as they do mathematics teachers, to augment the necessary formal instruction in English for votech students.

Before we can ask home school English teachers to help equip votech students with the necessary communication skills students will need to secure employment and to advance up a career ladder, we must help the teachers identify what these skills are. One way to do this is to introduce English teachers to the Department of Labor's Dictionary of Occupational Titles, or DOT as it is known. The DOT "...is based upon the premise that every job requires a worker to function in some degree to (with) DATA, PEOPLE, and THINGS." Each of the Occupational Titles in the DOT is assigned a unique nine-digit code, part of which indicates the comparative need for these three worker functions in that occupation. Understanding this code, specifically the code for PEOPLE, can help one to identify the communication skills typically expected of workers in a given job.

The category DATA, as a Worker Function, involves a range of skills and responsibilities from Comparing and Copying to Coordinating and Synthesizing. THINGS, as a Worker Function, involves manipulation of materials, machines, tools, equipment and products ranging from Handling and Tending to Precision Working and Set Up. The Category PEOPLE, as a Worker Function of most interest to English teachers, involves relationships with individuals ranging from Taking Instructions and Serving to Negotiating and Mentoring. (The complete list of DOT PEOPLE categories is attached.) Clearly, the category PEOPLE, which relates to every known occupation, involves some form of communication.

Whether communicating with fellow workers, taking instructions, asking clarification questions, training others, or interacting with customers, communication is a necessary worker function. It is not enough to demand that votech students acquire these necessary skills. Someone has to take the responsibility for delivering them. Who better to do this than the votech student's high school English teacher?

When we combine the three-pronged inservice experience for all secondary-level academic teachers teaching votech students with the specific and convincing background the DOT exposure offers in support of communication skills, English teachers could well become a votech student's best ally.

CONCLUSION

Today's teachers, as well as tomorrow's teachers, must have the necessary knowledge and prerequisite attitudes to respond to student needs. When it comes to vocational-technical students such required knowledge and attitudes are often missing--both in a teachers' personal experience and in his or her professional training. As teacher trainers we have a responsibility to try and fill this void. The pre-service and inservice programs, with a special emphasis on the role of English teachers, described in this paper are the author's suggestions for action.

Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT)

A basis for communications skills

This government document contains thousands of concise definitions for occupational titles common to today's workplace. The DOT structures and analyzes the total world of work, with special attention paid to defining specific worker actions.

According to the DOT, every job demands that workers function effectively with the categories DATA, PEOPLE, and THINGS. These categories help summarize exactly what a worker does on each job.

PEOPLE is that category that involves the use of communication skills when dealing with other humans--customers, co-workers, employees, employers, etc. Each category (DATA, PEOPLE, THINGS) is further subdivided into numbered fucntions. A job's relationship to DATA, PEOPLE, and THINGS can be expressed in terms of the lowest numbered function in each sequence. The lower the number function, the greater the worker responsibility.

The three categories (DATA, PEOPLE, THINGS), along with their numbered functions, are displayed below. Each function in PEOPLE category is defined in detail on the back of this page. Note how much proficiency in communications skills would be needed to effectively carry out these functions.

DATA (4th digit)	PEOPLE (5th digit)	THINGS (6th digit)
0 Synthesizing	0 Mentoring	0 Setting-Up
1 Coordinating	1 Negotiating	1 Precision Working
2 Analyzing	2 Instructing	2 Operating-Controlling
3 Compiling	3 Supervising	3 Driving-Operating
4 Computing	4 Diverting	4 Manipulating
5 Copying	5 Persuading	5 Tending
6 Comparing	6 Speaking-Signaling	6 Feeding - Offbearing
	7 Serving	7 Handling
	8 Taking Instructions - Helping	

Functions within the PEOPLE Category

"0" Mentoring: Dealing with individuals in terms of their total personality in order to advise, counsel, and/or guide them with regard to problems that may be resolved by legal, scientific, clinical, spiritual, and/or other professional principles.

"1" Negotiating: Exchanging ideas, information, and opinions with others to formulate policies and programs and/or arrive jointly at decisions, conclusions, or solutions.

"2" Instructing: Teaching subject matter to others, or training others through explanation, demonstration, and supervised practice; or making recommendations on the basis of technical disciplines.

"3" Supervising: Determining or interpreting work procedures for a group of workers, assigning specific duties to them, maintaining harmonious relations among them, and promoting efficiency.

"4" Diverting: Amusing others (stage, screen, radio, television).

"5" Persuading: Influencing others in favor of a product, service, or point of view.

"6" Speaking-Signaling: Talking with and/or signaling people to convey or exchange information. Includes giving assignments and/or directions to helpers or assistants.

"7" Serving: Attending to the needs or requests of people or the expressed or implicit wishes of people. Immediate response is involved.

"8" Taking Instructions-Helping: Helping applies to "non-learning" helpers. No variety of responsibility is involved in this function.

ATTACHMENT #2

ECTS SURVEY
Perceived Importance of Oral Communication for VoTech Graduates

	DATA	PEOPLE	THINGS
Votech Teachers	25%	38%	37%
Employers	25%	39%	36%
Craft Committees	29%	32%	39%
Co-op Students	19%	40%	41%

ERIE CITY TECH SURVEY
Vocational Education Curriculum Enhancement Survey
Summary Results

	Final Rankings		
	Business (N = 385)	Educators (N = 63)	Students (N = 704)
Attendance/Dependability	1	1	1
Positive Attitude	2	2	3
VERBAL COMMUNICATION	3	3	5
Problem Solving/Reasoning	4	4	8
Self Confidence (*)	5	5	2
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS	6	10/11	11
Personal Appearance	7	9	7
Flexibility	8	12	10
Safety Awareness	9	7	4
Technical Skills	10	6	6
WRITTEN COMMUNICATION	11	8	12
Mathematical Skills	12	10/11	9
Understanding of Free Enter System	13	14	13
Familiarity with Computers	14	13	14

*Self Confidence and ability to orally communicate are correlated.

ATTACHMENT #3

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

For a Vocationally-Oriented Oral Communication Unit

GOAL: Be able to verbally communicate clearly and audibly using basic trade terms in a manner reflecting trade competence with all persons encountered during regular work duties.

Obj. Demonstrate understanding of diversity among persons and procedure for analysis of others in speaking situation.

Obj. Demonstrate understanding that oral communication is a dynamic, transactional process.

Obj. Explain a trade process both to peers and to laypersons.

Obj. Deliver a well-organized technical demonstration speech.

Obj. _____

GOAL: Be able to cooperate on group projects.

Obj. Demonstrate understanding of roles in small groups.

Obj. Demonstrate understanding of use of the Reflective Thinking Sequence in small groups.

Obj. Actively participate in a problem-solving group discussion.

Obj. _____

GOAL: Be able to use the telephone.

Obj. List and explain the communication barriers pertinent to telephone conversation.

Obj. Demonstrate telephone courtesy both as the caller and the callee.

Obj. Demonstrate coding and decoding for telephone message exchange.

Obj. Demonstrate understanding of vocal tone implications.

Obj. _____

GOAL: Be able to take and give directions.

Obj. List and explain the 10 keys to good listening.

Obj. Demonstrate understanding of the principle of assuming responsibility for outcomes of our communication.

Obj. Demonstrate understanding of the principle of message making which includes anticipation of communication errors.

Obj. _____

GOAL: Be able to supervise others.

Obj. Demonstrate empathic listening by serving as constructive evaluator of classmates' speaking.

Obj. Perform analytical role play of authority situation.

Obj. Deliver extemporaneous speech using the motivating process.

Obj. _____

GOAL: _____

Obj. _____

Obj. _____